



**Manchester
Metropolitan
University**

Neate, HL (2018) Book Review: Healing Spaces, Modern Architecture, and the Body. *Cultural Geographies*, 25 (2). pp. 383-384. ISSN 1474-4740

Downloaded from: <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/620859/>

Version: Accepted Version

Publisher: SAGE Publications

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474017726557>

Please cite the published version

<https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk>

Healing Spaces, Modern Architecture, and the Body. Shara Shrank and Didem Ekici, editors. London; New York: Routledge. 2017. 228 pp. £110 hardback, £27.99 e-book. ISBN: 9781472470836, 9781315586298.

Healing Spaces, Modern Architecture, and the Body is a collection of short essays spanning 'urban humanities, geography, architectural history, the history of medicine, and critical visual studies' (p. 2). There are certainly critical and conceptual markers dotted throughout that will be familiar to cultural geographers: Foucault's *machine a geurier* and biopower, Lefebvre's *Production of Space*, as well as nods to humanistic geography and environmental psychology. The collection adopts a refreshingly broad take on how the architectures of health and healing might be conceived – from children's playgrounds to medical museums via landscape gardens. Essays span 'the nineteenth century through the heyday of modernist architectural experimentation in the 1920s and 1930s and onward into the 1970s' (p. 2). However, the collection isn't organised by time periods, instead being divided into three main sections that thematically cover: 'Interior Spaces and Everyday Therapeutic Architecture'; 'Healing Landscapes and the Body Out-of-Doors'; and 'Public Health and Modern Medical Institutions'. The notion of architecture and design as practices that can encourage, if not improve, health is hardly a new one, and is certainly a belief that was embraced by modernist architects of the twentieth century who were designing for the model modern citizen, though the collection offers valuable insights into the intertwined development of medical science and architectural practice/thought.

Despite the thematic apparatus used to organise the chapters the introduction was perhaps a little too brief, and I feel the editors may have offered a bit more here to really emphasise the connections between the meticulously researched empirical chapters. The following of which stood out for me: Sarah Schrank's insights into how nudist lifestyles were incorporated into suburban housing design; John Stanislav Sadar's study of how glass was engineered and manufactured to 'transmit' health; as well as Thomas Strickland's detailed account of how shifting ideas about the medical body were incorporated into the design of public space in the seventies brutalist McMaster Health Sciences Center.

I read the collection in June 2017, a period when, in the UK, modernist architecture and built forms – particularly the tower block or high-rise – were under attack in the press, yet again, as being unsafe, hazardous and not fit-for-purpose in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire in the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. This was a disaster that resulted in the absolutely tragic death of many residents who lived in a typical example of post-war public housing. Whilst being bombarded with a familiar and vociferous discourse of 'failed architecture' it was almost reassuring to engage with a series of texts whose focus is firmly on the therapeutic, medicinal and healing possibilities and affordances of architecture, landscaping and urban design (even though not all of these ideas were destined to stand the test of time). What this collection offered me were glimpses into potential directions for work within the geographies of architecture around care, health and therapy particularly when it comes to modernist architecture and planning. This involves thinking beyond ruination, dereliction and 'failure', and to focus on how, both historically and now, buildings are intricately part of complex cultures and practices of care and maintenance, which have significant impacts on the lives and health (both physical and mental) of residents and users.

*Hannah Neate, Lecturer in Human Geography
Manchester Metropolitan University*